



# **THE DECLINE IN ARIZONA JUVENILE CRIME**

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## **Executive Summary**

According to official reports, juvenile crime in Arizona is declining. In fact, the number of juvenile arrests has declined since 1996, and the percentage of Arizona violent and property crimes cleared by juvenile arrest has also declined. Meanwhile, the number of juvenile petitions increased through 2000, and then decreased in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Recently, Director Branham asked the Research and Development Division to look into the decline and explain why it has occurred.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the decline in Arizona juvenile crime by contacting selected police, probation and prosecutors offices in Arizona. When contacting them we sought to confirm the apparent decline in juvenile crime and to identify possible causes for the decline.

Nine of the eleven Arizona justice agencies who participated in our study believed that juvenile crime has declined in their jurisdictions. This is very good news for Arizona. The eleven officials credited a range of programs with contributing to the decline in juvenile crime. The programs ranged from the transfer of violent and serious juvenile offenders to adult court through gang, school and family-based interventions. While the decline in juvenile crime should be cause for celebration, additional evaluation research will need to be conducted on the cited programs to measure the contribution each had on the decline in crime. Evaluation research is vital to determining which programs have scientific support and deserve replication in other Arizona jurisdictions that did not experience declines in juvenile crime.

This report is organized into the following four sections: Background, Methodology, Findings and Conclusions.

## Background

According to official reports, juvenile crime in Arizona is declining. Is it really declining, and if it is, what could be causing the decline? These are important questions to ask in 2003 insofar as there was a great deal of attention devoted to Arizona juvenile crime in the mid 1990s, and it would be useful to know if the programs implemented at that time had their desired effect. The primary source of information on Arizona juvenile crime is *Crime in Arizona*, published by the Arizona Department of Public Safety and *Juveniles Processed in the Arizona Court System (Juveniles Processed)* published by the Arizona Supreme Court, Administrative Office of the Courts. *Crime in Arizona* contains law enforcement data from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program. *Juveniles Processed* contains referral, petition and disposition data from the prosecutorial and judicial branches of government. UCR reported crime data are the most frequently used source of information on Arizona crime trends. Offender age is unavailable<sup>1</sup> for reported crime, so the number of juveniles committing crimes in Arizona can only be estimated by referring to the number of juveniles arrested, or by referring to the percentage of crimes cleared because of a juvenile arrest. As displayed in Tables 1, 2 and 3, the number of juvenile arrests has declined since 1996, and the percentage of Arizona violent and property crimes cleared by juvenile arrest has also declined. Meanwhile, the number of juvenile petitions<sup>2</sup> increased through 2000, and then decreased in 2001 and 2002 (see Table 3 and Figure 1).

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1 The new National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) will correct this shortcoming.

2 Petitions represent charges brought against juveniles within the Juvenile Court.

Table 1

<b><i>VIOLENT CRIME<sup>3</sup></i></b>			
<b>YEAR</b>	<b>REPORTED CRIME</b>	<b>CLEARANCES</b>	<b>CLEARANCES INVOLVING JUVENILES</b>
<b>1996</b>	27,626	11,299	15.8%
<b>1997</b>	27,429	11,314	16.8%
<b>1998</b>	26,281	10,384	16.5%
<b>1999</b>	25,835	10,247	15.4%
<b>2000</b>	27,187	10,603	14.4%
<b>2001</b>	28,373	10,586	15.0%
<b>2002</b>	29,782	11,472	13.2%

Table 2

<b><i>PROPERTY CRIME<sup>4</sup></i></b>			
<b>YEAR</b>	<b>REPORTED CRIME</b>	<b>CLEARANCES</b>	<b>CLEARANCES INVOLVING JUVENILES</b>
<b>1996</b>	283,131	48,233	25.6%
<b>1997</b>	289,061	45,573	25.4%
<b>1998</b>	274,629	44,477	23.3%
<b>1999</b>	252,969	39,312	23.4%
<b>2000</b>	272,636	37,372	23.4%
<b>2001</b>	292,463	37,943	21.6%
<b>2002</b>	314,399	41,517	20.5%

Table 3

	<b>ARRESTS<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>REFERRALS<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>PETITIONS<sup>7</sup></b>
<b>1996<sup>8</sup></b>	73,046	50,820	16,384
<b>1997</b>	69,493	50,210	17,733
<b>1998</b>	64,419	51,009	18,496
<b>1999</b>	58,688	48,246	18,186
<b>2000</b>	58,807	48,534	20,204
<b>2001</b>	53,850	51,274	19,983
<b>2002</b>	52,373	50,399	19,036
<b>2003</b>	unavailable	49,588	17,903

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3 Source: Crime in Arizona

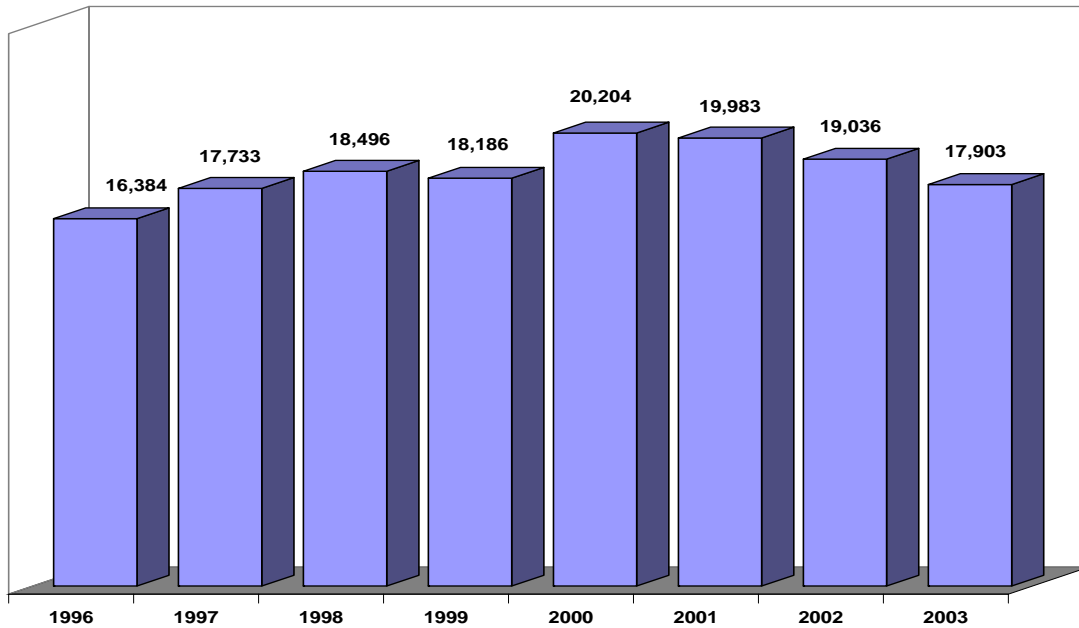
4 Source: Crime in Arizona

5 Source: Crime in Arizona

6 Source: Juveniles Processed

7 Source: Juveniles Processed

8 Referral and petition data are for the respective fiscal years of July through June.



The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the decline in Arizona juvenile crime by contacting selected police, probation and prosecutors offices in Arizona. When contacting them we sought to confirm the apparent decline in juvenile crime and to identify possible causes for the decline.

### **Methodology**

To obtain more information on juvenile arrests, we started with the three Arizona counties that provide most of the commitments to ADJC that also had declines in juvenile arrests. The three counties were Maricopa, Pima and Yavapai. Using a standard questionnaire we contacted the Chiefs of Police in the largest 11 police departments in these three counties. We told the Chief's office of the purpose of our study, and we asked them to direct us to the appropriate party who could best answer our questions. Eight of the eleven departments provided us with information for our study.

To obtain more information on referrals, we started with the four Arizona counties that provide most of the commitments to ADJC that also had decreases in referrals. The four

counties were Maricopa, Pima, Coconino and Pinal. Using a standard questionnaire, we contacted the Chief Juvenile Probation Officers within each of the four counties. We advised the Chief's office of the purpose of our study and asked them to direct us to the appropriate party who could best answer our questions. We have gotten information back from two of the four Arizona counties.

To obtain more information on juvenile petitions, we started with the two Arizona counties that provide most of the commitments to ADJC that also had decreases in petitions. The two counties were Maricopa and Pima. Using a standard questionnaire, we contacted the Chief Juvenile Prosecutor. We advised the Chief's office of the purpose of our study and asked them to direct us to the appropriate party within their department who could best answer our questions. We have gotten information back from one of the counties.

### **Law Enforcement Findings**

The police departments provided us with information which confirmed the decline in juvenile crime and attributed the decline to various programs that have been implemented since 1997. Six of the police departments told us that their arrest data corroborated the UCR data showing declines in juvenile arrests. Two other police departments provided data different than what was originally reported in *Crime in Arizona*, and the new data showed increases in juvenile arrests in their jurisdictions. Differences between the two arrest data bases were not examined in this study, but are most likely the result of definitional differences.

Many of the police departments reported new programs which they said probably contributed to the decline in juvenile crime. Tucson reported a greater emphasis upon schools and truancy. Mesa identified a new program for juvenile status offenders and a *Families in Need* program that they felt reduced the number of juvenile arrests. Mesa also told us that the addition of three new *Positive Alternatives to Gangs Advocates* meant that they were impacting more at-risk juveniles. Glendale, meanwhile, noted that a sweep of gang members in 2002 helped reduce juvenile crime in their area. Phoenix and Peoria reported that curfew violations were not being enforced as they were previously. Cottonwood identified a new school-based program which has helped reduce juvenile crime.

Tucson attributed the decline to police and community-based efforts to reach at-risk youth at a young age. They mentioned School Resource Officers in middle and elementary schools as examples of this effort. Glendale attributed the decline in juvenile crime to their efforts of holding gang members accountable. Mesa attributed the decline in juvenile crime to their efforts to intercede in junior high schools where they address disciplinary problems. Peoria attributed the decline to two factors: a new person in charge of juvenile detention who has instituted an education initiative on discipline, and greater interaction between the Peoria Police Department and local charter schools. Phoenix Police Department felt that without a proper research design it was impossible to determine the cause for the decrease. None of the police departments were aware of any other studies done on juvenile crime in Arizona.

### **Probation Findings**

The probation departments that provided us with information confirmed the decline in referrals, however, they were unable to attribute the decline to specific juvenile policies or programs. Coconino County Probation reported that the decline in juvenile referrals was part of an overall reduction in referrals and petitions to juvenile court. Neither of the probation departments were aware of any other studies done on juvenile crime in Arizona.

### **Prosecutor Findings**

The prosecutor that provided us with information confirmed the decline in petitions reported in *Juveniles Processed*, but said that it was smaller than they had hoped-for. The Pima County Attorney's Office identified six policies and programs that contributed to the decline. First, when Proposition 102 and Senate Bill (SB) 1446 were implemented in 1997, they resulted in violent and chronic juvenile offenders having charges filed in adult rather than juvenile court. Second, placing violent and chronic juveniles in the adult system freed resources to be used for the remaining cases in the juvenile justice system enhancing the likelihood that they would desist from offending. Third, the School Multi-Agency Response Team (SMART) program resulted in a decline in school-related drug offenses. Fourth, Pima County instituted a program in 1997 whereby prosecutors were assigned to specific regions which allowed them to become familiar with the respective schools and neighborhoods and thereby select the most appropriate dispositions for juvenile offenders. Fifth, Community Justice Boards were cited as aids to reducing the



number of juvenile petitions. Finally, Pima County engaged in community-based prosecution by encouraging their prosecutors to appear in school classrooms and to interact with community service groups on juvenile crime issues. The Pima County Prosecutor also reported efforts to hold juveniles more accountable for their actions, stepped-up efforts to educate school and police officials on what constituted a crime, and an increase in the education of Pima County prosecutors themselves on what cases could be diverted from the juvenile justice system. They were unaware of any other studies done on juvenile crime in Arizona.

### **Conclusions**

Nine of the eleven Arizona justice officials we contacted during our study believed that juvenile crime has, in fact, declined in their jurisdictions. This is very good news for Arizona. The officials we contacted credited a range of programs with contributing to the decline in juvenile crime. The programs ranged from the transfer of violent and serious juvenile offenders to adult court through gang, school and family based interventions. While the decline in juvenile crime should be cause for celebration, additional evaluation research will need to be done on the cited programs to measure the contribution each had on the decline in crime within their jurisdictions. This type of evaluation research is vital to determining which programs have scientific support. This scientific support should also be helpful to deciding which programs should be replicated in other Arizona jurisdictions that did not experience declines in juvenile crime.